

Virginia Child Day-Care Council Op Ed.

Media release: May 2007

People may not know us by name, but parents with children in day care “see” us every day through the regulations that keep their children out of harm’s way. We are the Virginia Child Day-Care Council (CDCC). Whether the daycare is in a bustling Fairfax suburb, or along a quiet street in Abingdon, parents want assurances that their children will be in a safe and nurturing environment. The Child Day-Care Council researches and recommends regulations that govern everything from playground equipment to teacher qualifications in the approximately 2,450 licensed child day centers in Virginia.

We are very excited about Governor Kaine’s Smart Beginnings Initiative and the Commonwealth’s renewed focus on early childhood development. Equipping our children to face the personal, educational and societal challenges that lie ahead is a shared goal of our citizenry. We believe that the better the job is done in child day centers, the better prepared Virginia’s children will be when they enter their neighborhood school system. We are proud of the role we have played in strengthening child day center programs and welcome the opportunity to share our progress with you.

CDCC membership is mandated by the Code of Virginia and includes private and non-profit providers, a pediatric health professional, a parent representative, accreditation officials, and governmental representatives from the Departments of Social Services, Education, Housing, Health, Fire, and other interested parties.

Virginia law requires periodic review of all regulations. The Child Day-Care Council has carefully reviewed the regulations that have governed licensed child day centers since the last regulatory change in 1998. CDCC reviewed detailed national research related to the proposed changes and considered more than 3,000 letters and e-mails from interested parents and providers. Six public hearings were held around the Commonwealth to hear the concerns of all involved. The results of this analysis- especially, the parental input- guided our recommendations. In 2005, Governor Warner signed the Child Day-Care Council’s suggested changes into law. Once the regulatory changes were approved, the Virginia Department of Social Services began training providers across the state about compliance and enforcement of the new regulations.

One particularly controversial regulatory change was the square footage per child space requirement. Forty-two other states already require 35 square feet per child, and the Council believed that this change would be an improvement for Virginia’s children; however, potential fiscal hardship for existing facilities was a concern. To ease their burden, the final regulation allowed current facilities to remain at 25 feet per child. As a compromise, the space increase would apply to new facilities and those yet to be licensed. The feedback and ideas that we receive from the public allow us to plan for the future, while considering the realities of the present.

In addition, the CCDC increased the staff-to-child ratios for younger children, and increased the training requirements for the directors of facilities as well as the teachers/providers employed to care for the children. The Council also recommended increased safety features for playground areas as well as other changes that would benefit the well-being of children in licensed child day centers. We believe that the end result is improvement in the child day center environment for Virginia families who choose out-of-home care for their young ones.

Some providers and parents fear that a change in regulations will make compliance more difficult to achieve and centers will close as a result; this has not been the case in Virginia. In fact, the number of licensed child day centers continues to increase across the Commonwealth.

The Child Day-Care Council welcomes the input received from families and providers. When the review process begins again in the spring of 2009, this information will be most helpful. It is our hope that through improved standards for child day centers in Virginia, each child will reach his or her fullest potential in a healthy, safe and enriching environment.

Send your inquiries about the Child Day-Care Council to daycare.council@dss.virginia.gov